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Chairman: Mr. Raubenheimer (Vice-Chairman) ..... (South Africa)
later: Ms. Cronenberg-Mossberg (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Sweden)

Contents

Agenda item 98: Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) *(continued)*

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 98: Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) *(continued)* (A/58/179, A/58/204 and A/58/72-E/2003/53)

1 **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that poverty eradication was the greatest challenge facing the international community and was a prerequisite for sustainable development. The gap between rich and poor and the increasing inequality between developed and developing countries represented a serious threat to prosperity, security and stability around the world. Tunisia welcomed the commitment of the United Nations to poverty eradication, a multidimensional task that called for an integrated approach such as the one set forth in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. That approach stressed the importance of integrating women into economic life and adopting effective sectoral strategies in areas such as education, human resources training, health, rural development, water, sanitation, food security and energy.

2 Tunisia was concerned that progress in the implementation of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty had been uneven. Many countries had adopted poverty-reduction strategies with the aim of using their resources to advantage and promoting integrated economic and social development, but they still needed external assistance and international cooperation if they were to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

3 The commitments made by the international community at United Nations conferences and summits should be reflected in concrete measures, particularly in terms of official development assistance, increased flows of foreign direct investment and reduction or cancellation of the debt of developing countries, including middle-income countries. The fundamental problem of farm subsidies and market access was also a problem urgently requiring attention. The breakdown of negotiations at Cancun was regrettable and clearly illustrated the difficulties faced by developing countries in their efforts to gain market access for their exports. Good governance at the international level was crucial to the creation of a favourable global economic environment and the reform of the international economic order with the effective participation of developing countries.

4 The international community had recognized the important role played by microcredit in fighting poverty and the marginalization of the poor. The proclamation of 2005 as the International Year of Microcredit would provide an opportunity for exchanging experiences and best practices in that area. Tunisia supported the draft resolution on that issue that would be submitted by the Group of 77 and China.

5 In Tunisia, the disadvantaged sectors had received support from the State through its social programmes, particularly the national solidarity fund created in 1994. The purpose of the fund, which had been established by the Head of State, was to promote depressed areas, known also as "shadow areas". Those efforts had been successful and at present, the poverty rate was only 4.2 per cent. The World Solidarity Fund established by the Heads of State and Government at the Johannesburg Summit provided a new instrument whereby the international community would be able to contribute towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the target of halving the number of people living on less than one dollar per day. The Tunisian delegation hoped that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would operationalize the Fund without delay, establishing a high-level committee to define the strategy of the Fund and mobilizing the financial resources necessary for its operation.

6 **Ms. Hermoso** (International Labour Organization) said that there were some 550 million workers who did not earn enough to keep their families above the poverty line and an estimated 1.2 billion living in extreme poverty. Not surprisingly, therefore, poverty reduction was at the top of the international development agenda.

7 Poverty reduction, social inclusion and social justice were central to the mandate of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The world of work was a critical entry point for achieving those objectives. Progress towards reducing poverty required integrated policies and action on the four pillars that made up the Decent Work Agenda, namely, employment, respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection to improve safety and health at the

workplace and combat social exclusion, and social dialogue.

8. The International Labour Organization supported the statement made by the representative of Peru, who had pointed out that one of the main challenges currently facing the Rio Group was that of growing unemployment, a fundamental cause of poverty. Unemployment was a result of inadequate economic growth, the gap between developed and developing countries and an international trade environment that was unfavourable to developing countries owing to protectionist measures and the drop in external financing.

9. The support of ILO for employment-intensive investment programmes was one example of efforts to show that decent work could be promoted in that context. Those programmes, which had already had positive results in a number of countries, focused on training to promote local private sector development, transparent contracting and payment systems, the development of credit facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises, microfinancing, and capacity building for community-based organizations in the informal economy. In those programmes, practical information on ways to incorporate employment as a criterion for public investment was compiled and disseminated based on experiences in different regions. The fundamental and other standards of ILO, labour protection and social dialogue were introduced in all projects.

10. The International Labour Organization was committed to reducing poverty, promoting decent work and addressing the social dimension of globalization. The conclusions and recommendations of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization would focus on ways of making globalization inclusive and equitable. The Organization would be working closely with the African Union and other development partners on preparations for the Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation, to be held in Burkina Faso in 2004. The Summit offered an unprecedented opportunity to work with the African Union in combating poverty and social exclusion in Africa through Decent Work.

11. **Mr. Gopinathan** (India) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The annual consideration in the Second Committee of the item on the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty afforded members an opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved so far, to identify the bottlenecks and to put in place appropriate responses to overcome those bottlenecks. Poverty was multidimensional and expressed itself in the form of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy and lack of basic services. The challenge for any poverty-reduction policy was to address the issues meaningfully, effectively and in a result-oriented manner. A development strategy was needed that focused on economic growth and included specific programmes designed to address human development issues.

12. The projections by the international financial institutions and development agencies on the prospects for achieving the global poverty-reduction target in the Millennium Declaration, of reducing the proportion of people living in poverty by half by the year 2015 were not very encouraging. Though growth was essential, growth alone would not be enough to reach the goal. The projected growth in per capita GDP would enable only five of the six developing regions to reach the goal for reducing poverty. Africa would miss the target by over 10 percentage points, in fact, the number of people living on less than one dollar a day in Africa would increase.

13. Studies by the World Bank had estimated that an additional $50 billion a year in official development assistance (ODA) alone would be required to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The role of the international community in making available financial resources, transferring technology and providing support for capacity building in the developing countries was crucial. At the Monterrey and Johannesburg conferences, the international community had committed to greater resource transfers by developed countries to developing countries. The commitments that had been undertaken must be translated into concrete actions in the areas of trade, debt relief and aid. Funds that had been pledged should be made available, and further funding commitments should be made so as to reach the agreed ODA target of 0.7 per cent of GNP. India also called for a fair, equitable and non-discriminatory trading system that would address the concerns of the developing countries and ensure enhanced and predictable market access. The enhanced participation of developing countries and a greater voice for them in international economic

decision-making and norm-setting processes would ensure that their concerns were duly reflected and that would contribute towards creating an international environment supportive of development.

14. India had evolved a national poverty-eradication strategy based on the acceleration of economic growth and the provision of basic services to improve the quality of life of the poorer segments through specific and targeted programmes, particularly in the area of job creation and income generation. The success of the strategy was reflected in the fact that the poverty ratio had declined from 38.9 per cent in 1987 to 26.17 per cent in 2000. India planned to reduce the poverty ratio by an additional five percentage points by 2007 and by 15 percentage points by 2012.

15. The report of the Secretary-General indicated that progress in reducing poverty had been mixed, and that many countries were not likely to achieve the poverty-reduction goals by 2015. External assistance and international cooperation were still vital to ensure that the poorest countries achieved the Millennium Development Goals.

16. His delegation took note of the information in the report of the Secretary-General on the importance of microcredit and microfinance in the eradication of poverty and shared the view that microfinance was a useful tool in building the capacities of the poor in management of sustainable self-employment activities and providing them other services such as savings, consumer credit, housing and insurance. His delegation hoped that the activities planned for the International Year of Microcredit would address the issue of funding requirements for capacity building and for the establishment of microfinance institutions in the developing countries.

17. **Mr. Ramadan** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The eradication of poverty and hunger should be the basic objective of the international community. In 1992, the United Nations had renewed its firm commitment to that goal by proclaiming the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. All United Nations conferences and summits that had been held since then had focused on achieving that objective. Thus, in the Millennium Declaration, the international community had undertaken to eradicate poverty and to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income was less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffered from hunger. The goal of eradicating poverty had also been stressed at the Monterrey Conference and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The establishment of the World Solidarity Fund was proof of the firm determination of the international community to eradicate poverty and hunger and promote economic, social and human development in the developing countries.

18. Progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals had been slow. In some developing countries, especially in Africa, the number of poor people was expected to increase from 315 million to 404 million between 1999 and 2015. It would be impossible to eradicate poverty without truly sustainable economic and social development that would enable countries to diversify and improve the quality of their products so as to compete on international markets, particularly the markets of developed countries.

19. Donor countries should assume responsibility for providing assistance to developing countries, especially in Africa, so as to help them overcome their difficult economic situation. Official development assistance and flows of foreign direct investment should be increased, debt relief should be provided, and technology transfer should be promoted. The capacities of developing countries should be strengthened so as to enable them to acquire new information and communication technologies and enjoy the benefits of globalization, thus facilitating their integration into the world economy. The developing countries, for their part, should adopt development-oriented national policies and take advantage of their own material and human resources, they should develop their capacities, achieve security and stability, implement appropriate governance measures, eliminate practices that hindered development and attract foreign investment with a view to achieving sustainable economic development, eradicating poverty and hunger and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

20. The international community should increase its support for activities aimed at eradicating poverty at the national, regional and international levels, and it should fulfil the commitments made at international conferences and summits by implementing the initiatives and programmes adopted, contributing to the World Solidarity Fund and supporting the New

Partnership for Africa's Development. Despite the unilateral sanctions imposed on it for more than two decades, which had caused billions of dollars worth of losses, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya would never hesitate to support the initiatives of developing countries, especially in Africa. At the national level, the high priority which the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya attached to poverty eradication was evidenced in policies and programmes that had provided social security, universal free education, suitable housing and health care for all its families.

21. **Ms. Ninh Thi Binh** (Viet Nam) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Poverty eradication was a core issue in the world's development agenda, however, the global poverty situation was still serious, and progress in the implementation of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty was uneven. Viet Nam was concerned by the fact that 1.2 billion people in the world were still without access to safe drinking water, 42 million people were living with HIV, and a large number of people were hungry, while economic disparity within and amongst nations was increasing.

22. Extraordinary efforts were needed, at both the national and the international levels, to reduce poverty substantially. All donor countries should increase their efforts to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for official development assistance, promote trade with developing countries and increase investment flows to them. In the same vein, developing countries must be determined to adapt and carry out poverty-reduction strategies and adopt them as their own.

23. Her delegation supported the establishment of the World Solidarity Fund to mobilize more financial resources for poverty eradication and called on the international community, including civil society and the business sector, to make voluntary contributions to the Fund. It welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal on activities for the International Year of Microcredit. Given the role of microcredit in income generation and, in particular, its impact on the lives of women living in poverty, more credit projects should be implemented so as to enhance the participation of women in rural areas.

24. Poverty eradication was the top priority of Viet Nam's development policy. Thanks to the economic reform and its tireless efforts, Viet Nam had made remarkable progress over the past decade, particularly in regard to poverty, which had been reduced by half. The poverty rate now stood at 29 per cent compared with 37 per cent in 1998. The Government of Viet Nam was determined to integrate the Comprehensive Poverty-reduction and Growth Strategy into local development plans and to actively mobilize resources for poverty reduction and economic growth, with priority being given to health care and education for rural and mountainous areas, so as to narrow the gap between different areas in the country. Her delegation reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Viet Nam to the achievement of poverty eradication, sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals, and called on the international community to further strengthen development cooperation with and assistance to Viet Nam.

25. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was regrettable that the progress made so far in regard to poverty eradication was uneven at the regional and national levels and that, despite the observance of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), the prospect of achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people who lived on less than one dollar a day and those who suffered from hunger was still remote. At the current level of performance, the people of sub-Saharan Africa were not likely to accomplish the goals by 2015.

26. Foremost among the indicators of progress in the implementation of the United Nations Decade was the empowerment of women. His delegation was concerned that while women's share of non-agricultural wage employment had risen globally in the last decade, it had declined in the Middle East. Delivery of safe drinking water was inadequate for 50 per cent of the population in the developing world, and the debt burden on that world was hampering its efforts to alleviate poverty. An approach of good governance nationally through democratic decision making, accountability and transparency, and internationally by the introduction of a fair trading system free of subsidies and barriers combined with increased ODA levels would enable all countries to live up to their Millennium commitments.

27. Lebanon had emerged from a war and a 22-year Israeli occupation that had damaged its material

infrastructure and impoverished its human resources. The eradication of poverty and the achievement of development were especially daunting and overwhelming for the countries of the Middle East under occupation. External assistance and international cooperation were still essential.

28. *Ms. Cronenberg-Mossberg (Sweden), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

29. **Mr. Bossina** (Congo) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Millions of persons in the developing countries were still living in precarious conditions, subsisting on less than one dollar a day. The General Assembly had proclaimed the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), and in its resolution 57/266, of 20 December 2002, it had reiterated that the Decade should be devoted to achieving the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. However, progress had been inadequate and current results showed that many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, would not achieve the poverty-reduction goals by 2015. According to World Bank estimates, the number of poor people in the region would rise from 315 million in 1999 to 404 million in 2015.

30. Despite the good intentions and the signs of a reactivation of the world economy, the commitments made at different United Nations conferences and summits had not been fulfilled, as evidenced by the ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancun. The situation was even worse in Africa, where the growth rate, except in five countries, was still beneath the 7 per cent needed to attain the Millennium Development Goals, having fallen from 4.3 per cent in 2001 to 3.2 per cent in 2002, according to data supplied by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Hence, it was urgent that the international community should take concrete steps to help the continent eradicate poverty, especially in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

31. After the tragic armed conflict of 1992-1997, which had destroyed 90 per cent of the country's infrastructure and set it back 25 to 30 years, the Congo was once again on the road to peace and national unity. The country was engaged in a serious economic and social reconstruction effort which had been consolidated over the past six years thanks to a new constitutional framework and the improvement of governance in public affairs and finance. Assistance had been provided by donor countries and international financial institutions, including the World Bank.

32. Among others, the following initiatives had been implemented: an audit of the National Hydrocarbons Company, the conclusions of which were available; the social programme of President Sassou-Nguesso, objective 6 of which was to reduce poverty; the Imboulou hydroelectric project, which would supply power to the southern part of the country; improvement of the drinking water supply in urban centres and outlying areas, including the neighbourhoods around Brazzaville; the rehabilitation of hospitals and construction of new health centres; the creation of a national council to fight AIDS, presided over by the President of the Republic, which was working to change the attitudes and behaviour of the population; and the rehabilitation and furnishing of schools, with special emphasis on teaching staff, in order to make education available to everyone.

33. The Congo needed additional financial resources, as it could not carry out all those projects on its own. His Government would continue cooperating with the Bretton Woods institutions in an effort to reduce the debt and free up resources for productive investment in job creation and poverty reduction. To that end, the Government was drawing up a new document on its poverty-reduction strategy for the period 2004-2015, as well as two triennial poverty-reduction programmes for the periods 2004-2006 and 2007-2009. As stressed recently by his Government in presenting its country report at a meeting of the Board of Governors of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Congo needed the support and solidarity of the international community to supplement the efforts it was financing with its own resources.

34. **Mr. Hamidi** (Malaysia) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Despite the increased awareness of national governments and the special attention given by the relevant United Nations agencies to the need to tackle the problem of poverty, actual progress had been patchy and uneven. Official development assistance levels were still below the minimum levels needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. External

assistance and international cooperation were therefore crucial, and developed countries should meet their commitments on ODA obligation; otherwise, it would be impossible to eradicate poverty, even if the developing countries were to utilize whatever domestic resources were available and to apply the best form of governance.

35. Developing countries must have effective market access for their products, and to that end, the developed countries must fulfil their commitments as reflected in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Declaration. They must also act urgently on the question of subsidies for their farm products. The Doha development round negotiations should be resumed as soon as possible.

36. When Malaysia had achieved its independence, almost 70 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. Rural development and poverty eradication had been the cornerstone of national development planning in the early stages. Thanks to strategies such as the new economic policy, the national development policy, the national vision policy and the Vision 2020 programme, only 7.5 per cent of the population was presently considered poor.

37. Three concepts of poverty had been adopted by Malaysia in its poverty eradication programmes: absolute poverty, where the gross household monthly income was below the poverty line income; absolute hardcore poverty, where the gross monthly household income was less than half of the poverty line income; and relative poverty, which was linked to the notion of income inequality between groups. With those concepts in mind, poverty eradication could be achieved if the following conditions were present: a stable social and political environment that enabled the government to implement poverty eradication strategies and programmes; steady growth in the economy, leading to increased job opportunities and higher incomes; development strategies and programmes that favoured the poor and the vulnerable groups, with special emphasis on agriculture and rural development, education, training, infrastructure development and other social projects; strong support by non-governmental organizations and the private sector for government efforts through programmes such as skills and vocational training, specific programmes to assist the poor, and financial contributions to improve living conditions.

38. The primary responsibility for development rested with national governments. Each country should draw up and implement its own development policies taking into account its own unique circumstances within a favourable political and social environment. However, in some cases, such as that of the developing countries, there was a need for external assistance and support from the international community. Malaysia had benefited in the past from the assistance and cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank in the implementation of its rural development and poverty eradication programmes.

39. The eradication of poverty required collective action at the international level. The United Nations was the primary multilateral forum for coordinating action and mobilizing resources for the World Solidarity Fund. Additional resources might also be derived from a tax on world trade to be contributed to the United Nations, which could be used to tackle the economic ills in developing countries, with a view to reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, as envisaged in the Millennium Declaration.

40. **Mr. Sermoneta** (Israel) said that poverty was a multidimensional phenomenon that was linked to and exacerbated by hunger, disease and illiteracy. Poverty, gender inequality and income disparities were contradictory to the goals of sustainable development; they bred economic expediency and the exploitation of cheap labour rather than promoting the growth of technology-based economies. Furthermore, they brought about unregulated population movements with far-reaching demographic, cultural and political consequences. It was therefore important to promote efforts to provide financial products and services, such as microcredit, to poor people, highlighting the linkage between training and microcredit. Training and skills-enhancement facilitated the achievement of increased levels of initiative and promoted the creation of enterprises that, in turn, could make use of the financial services and tools designed for them.

41. Enabling people living in poverty to establish enterprises contributed to their empowerment and highlighted the importance of the involvement of women in such initiatives. That involvement also promoted an increase in women's participation in the labour force – an important factor in poverty-reduction policies – and helped develop a more gender-sensitive culture of entrepreneurship. It was regrettable that

disparity in the labour market had improved only marginally during the 1990s.

42. The realization of the need to improve the situation had prompted the Centre for International Cooperation of the Israeli Foreign Ministry to design training initiatives for poverty eradication aimed at enhancing women's capacities by developing their business networking and strengthening their role in trade unions and in leadership positions in business and politics at the local and national levels. To mark the International Year of Microcredit in 2005, the Ministry intended to strengthen its programmes for socio-economic development so as to place greater emphasis on the importance of microcredit as an income-generation tool.

43. There was a strong link between women's involvement and good governance. A national environment where democratic governance was strengthened, especially through participatory decision-making and women's participation in all aspects of social and economic life, was conducive to the achievement of growth and poverty eradication.

44. **Mr. Abreha** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on agenda item 98. Progress in the eradication of poverty had been lopsided, as not all regions or countries had benefited from it. In Africa, more than 350 million people, over 50 per cent of the population, still lived below the poverty line of one dollar a day. The burden of debt service, weak commodity prices, inadequate resources in terms of official development assistance and foreign direct investment, the vagaries of weather, lack of access to world markets, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and terrorism all hampered the efforts of the African countries to attain the Millennium Development Goals. To meet the goal of poverty reduction, Africa would have to achieve an annual growth rate of 7 per cent by 2015, through a strategy providing for coherence between their own tailor-made development policies and strong support and cooperation from the international community. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), launched by African leaders to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development, would play a significant role in helping to bring about the socio-economic transformation of the continent.

45. Forty-four per cent of the population of Ethiopia lived below the poverty line. Thus, poverty eradication was the central goal of its development activities. The Government had designed a policy framework that included the national sustainable development and poverty-reduction programme and the revised food security strategy for 2002. The overall objective of the Government's poverty-reduction strategy was to reduce poverty while maintaining macroeconomic stability. The strategy was built on a four-pronged approach: industrialization led by agricultural development; reform of the justice system and civil service; decentralization and empowerment; and capacity-building in the public and private sectors.

46. The recent drought-induced food shortage had already put the lives of 14 million people at risk, forcing them to depend entirely on relief aid. The Government had redirected its resources towards urgent and coordinated measures to mitigate the effects of the drought. It had revised the food security strategy to focus on providing extension services, voluntary resettlement, water harvesting, water diversion and income generation, which also contributed to sustainable development. However, as a least-developed country, Ethiopia faced a number of challenges. Good governance through democratization, decentralization and the active participation of the private sector, civil society and local communities, as well as anti-corruption measures, were essential prerequisites to success in the war on poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

47. Ethiopia welcomed the establishment of the World Solidarity Fund, which would help developing countries, particularly the least-developed countries, to alleviate the financial resource gap for their poverty eradication efforts. His delegation supported the proclamation of the year 2005 as the International Year of Microcredit, as that would give impetus to microcredit programmes around the world.

48. **Ms. Gebre-Egziabher** (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)) said that UN-HABITAT strongly supported the report of the Secretary-General and its recommendations, as well as the establishment of the World Solidarity Fund. Rapid rural-to-urban migration was putting a strain on the infrastructure and social fabric of the world's urban centres. In Latin America, 75 per cent of the population lived in urban areas; in Asia, the share was 36 per cent. Africa, however, was an even bigger challenge because

it was the fastest urbanizing continent. 37 per cent of Africans lived in cities, with more than half of the urban population living in slums. UN-HABITAT projections showed that by 2020, Africa would cease to be a rural continent, as over 50 per cent of its population would be in cities and towns. City planning and management systems were unable to cope with the massive population influx, and that would exacerbate the urban slum-housing crisis. Currently, 50 per cent of humanity lived in urban areas. Nearly 32 per cent of the world's urban population lived in slums, and in developing countries, 43 per cent of the urban population were slum dwellers.

49. For lack of alternatives, a significant proportion of the new urban population, especially women, engaged in urban and peri-urban food production, making irrelevant the dichotomy between economic activity in rural and urban areas and their natural division of labour. In the view of UN-HABITAT, development should no longer be cast in separate rural and urban contexts, but rather it should be contextualized in balanced territorial-development terms and integrated rural and urban development strategies.

50. **Mr. Khammanichanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 98. Despite the colossal difficulties it faced as an underdeveloped and landlocked country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had made an all-out effort to reduce poverty. Poverty reduction was the priority goal of its long-term strategy, which was aimed at moving the country away from the ranks of the least-developed countries by 2020. The Government had consolidated its strategic approach to poverty reduction through the national poverty eradication programme.

51. Thanks to the Government's efforts, poverty had decreased substantially over the last decade; the proportion of the population living under the poverty line had declined from 45 per cent in 1992-1993 to 38.6 per cent in 1997-1998, and it was hoped that the poverty level would fall further, to about 30 per cent, in 2002-2003. Given the disparities among different districts, the Government had reoriented its public investment programme to focus on the poorest districts, allocating a greater share of resources to them to ensure their gradual integration into the national economy. The national poverty eradication programme also reflected the Government's firm commitment to reduce the country's dependency on official development assistance through consistent efforts aimed at fostering growth and investment, improving tax administration and promoting all economic sectors, including the private sector.

52. **The Chairman** announced that the Committee had concluded the general debate on agenda item 98.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.